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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 001460

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: BROADCAST JOURNALIST FREED BY KIDNAPPERS

REF: MANILA 1399 (TOP BROADCAST JOURNALIST ABDUCTED  
IN MINDANAO)

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney  
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Kidnappers have released well-known broadcast journalist Ces Drilon and three members of her crew, after 10 days of captivity on Jolo Island. Drilon and her colleagues were abducted on June 8 on Jolo Island in southern Mindanao. While most media sources and government officials have publicly suggested that the terrorist Abu Sayyaf Group was behind the kidnapping, several military and police sources believe that a less-sophisticated kidnap-for-ransom criminal gang and, surprisingly, a town mayor are more likely the masterminds of this particular operation. In any event, the Philippine public is celebrating the hostages' safe release in this high-profile kidnapping. Philippine Armed Forces Chief of Staff General Yano told the Ambassador that with the resolution of this kidnapping incident the armed forces can resume operations against high-value terrorist targets put on hold by the hostage drama. END SUMMARY.

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Drilon and Other Hostages Released  
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12. (U) Late in the evening of June 17, ABS-CBN television reporter Ces Drilon, ABS-CBN cameraman Jimmy Encarnacion, and Drilon's guide, peace advocate and Mindanao State University professor Octavio Dinampo, were released after 10 days in captivity as hostages on Jolo Island (reftel). The award-winning broadcast journalist and her crew were abducted on June 8 in an isolated area of Jolo Island, in southern Mindanao, while reportedly en route to interview wanted terrorist Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) leader Radulan Sahiron. After the kidnappers released the hostages, Drilon, Encarnacion, and Dinampo were transferred to Zamboanga where they were met by relatives and colleagues and then remained overnight for medical checks and lengthy interviews with police investigators. The fourth hostage, another ABS-CBN cameraman, Angelo Valderama, was released by the kidnappers on June 12.

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Twisted Web of Suspects  
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13. (C) While the media and others continue to point fingers toward the terrorist ASG, several intelligence and military sources believe that a less sophisticated kidnap-for-ransom criminal gang is likely responsible for Drilon's kidnapping. Police have not ruled out the ASG, well-known for its kidnapping and extortion activities, but investigators are presently focused on the kidnappers' chosen negotiator, Indanan mayor Alvarez Isnaji, a former MNLF commander with established links to ASG and criminal operatives on Jolo

Island, who is also an announced candidate for governor in the upcoming Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao elections.

¶4. (C) Police investigators closely monitored Isnaji's negotiations with the kidnappers throughout the 10-day ordeal. On June 18, following the release of the hostages, the police unexpectedly arrested Isnaji and his son, Heider Isnaji, for their alleged involvement in the kidnappings. Other suspects have reportedly been identified by Drilon and the other hostages; however, it remains unclear whether this was the work of the ASG terrorists or a criminal gang affiliated with Mayor Isnaji.

¶5. (C) Government officials, including Philippine National Police Chief Razon, have publicly denied that any ransom payment or concession was made to the kidnappers; however, several police and military sources have told us that a payment of 15 million pesos (approximately \$337,000 USD) was made immediately prior to Drilon's release. Similarly, these police and military sources also believe a 5 million peso (approximately \$112,000 USD) ransom was also paid to secure the early release of cameraman Angelo Valderama on June 12. Indanan mayor Isnaji allegedly facilitated both payments and then escorted the hostages to his home, where they were met by police and military escorts.

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Military to Increase Tactical Operations on Jolo  
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¶6. (C) During a June 18 discussion with the Ambassador, Philippine Armed Forces Chief of Staff General Alexander Yano

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noted that the hostage crisis had diverted significant military resources and attention from the military's main goal of tracking and engaging terrorist targets. With Drilon's release, the military would now be able to re-engage in this key task.

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Kidnappings Lucrative for Terrorists and Criminals Alike  
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¶7. (C) Zamboanga City Prosecutor Ricardo Cabaron expressed concern to us on June 17 that the payments of similar high-value ransoms in recent months has only empowered young kidnapping groups in southern Mindanao. In a similar, albeit less high-profile, May 27 kidnapping of Zamboanga businessman Inocente Bautista, the family of the hostage reportedly paid 10 million pesos to kidnappers in order to secure his release. Cabaron noted that these kidnappers were far less sophisticated in their methods than seen in earlier years, an indication that more criminal groups may be capitalizing on kidnap-for-ransom operations as a source of income. Cabaron expressed grave concern that these kidnap-for-ransom groups will continue to operate in Zamboanga and the Sulu Archipelago without more successful investigations and prosecutions of the kidnappers. Cabaron recently filed criminal charges against seven suspects in the May 27 kidnapping of the Zamboanga businessman and hopes that similar charges will materialize for the masterminds of Ces Drilon's kidnapping.

KENNEY